

INK JET HEAD SUBSTRATE, INK JET HEAD USING THE
SUBSTRATE, AND INK JET PRINT APPARATUS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to an ink jet head substrate capable of performing stable printing with reduced malfunctions with respect to noises, an ink jet head using this ink jet head substrate, and 10 an ink jet print apparatus such as a printer using this ink jet head.

Related Background Art

An ink jet recording method (liquid jet recording method) is extremely excellent, for example, 15 in that generation of noises at the time of operation is negligibly very small and that high-speed recording is possible and recording on so-called plain paper can be performed without requiring special processing of fixing. Thus, the ink jet recording method has become a mainstream of a print 20 system recently. In particular, in an ink jet head utilizing thermal energy, thermal energy generated by a heating element (electrothermal converting element; heater) is given to a liquid, whereby a foaming 25 phenomenon is selectively caused in the liquid, and ink liquid droplets are discharged from discharge ports by energy of the foaming. In such an ink jet

head, for improvement of recording density (resolution), a large number of fine heating elements are arranged on a silicon semiconductor substrate and discharge ports are further arranged so as to be 5 opposed to the heating elements, respectively. In addition, a drive circuit and peripheral circuits for driving the heating elements are also provided on the silicon semiconductor substrate. The silicon semiconductor substrate with the heating elements, 10 the drive circuit, and the peripheral circuits provided thereon in this way is called an ink jet head substrate. For example, there is a tendency to provide, within an identical silicon semiconductor substrate, several tens to several thousands of 15 heating elements, drivers corresponding to each of the heating elements, a shift register with the same number of bits as the number of heating elements for sending respective image data, which are inputted serially, to the drivers in parallel with each other, 20 and a latch circuit for temporarily storing data, which are outputted from the shift register, for each heating element.

As described above, recently, integration of logic circuits such as a driver, a shift register, 25 and a latch on a head substrate has been advanced. However, a current pulse flowing to one heating element instantaneously reaches a relatively high

current value and, in the case in which the number of heating elements to be simultaneously turned ON (i.e., the number of discharge ports from which ink droplets are simultaneously discharged) is large, for example,

5 a pulse-like current in the order of one to several amperes flows to a power supply line for driving the heating elements and a ground (GND) line.

Since such a pulse-like large current flows, there arises such a fear that the logic circuit 10 section on the head substrate malfunctions due to noises caused by inductive coupling generated in flexible wiring from a printer apparatus main body to an ink jet head, wiring in the ink jet head, or the like. In addition, radiation of unnecessary 15 electromagnetic noises to the outside of the printer apparatus is also concerned.

A level of inductive noises becomes higher as an amount of change of current per a unit time increases. Thus, as the number of discharge ports 20 provided in the ink jet head is increased for high-speed or high-precision printing or the like, it is expected that the number of elements which are simultaneously turned ON increases and a current value of current pulses further increases as well. 25 Accordingly, a noise level becomes higher.

Therefore, instead of driving the large number of discharge ports provided on the head substrate

simultaneously, these discharge ports are divided into a plurality of blocks, and driving by a unit of block is performed. That is, at certain timing, the heating elements are selectively driven in a first 5 block and no heating element is driven in the remaining blocks. At the next timing, the heating elements are selectively driven in a second block and no heating element is driven in the remaining blocks. The heating elements in subsequent blocks are driven 10 in the same manner, whereby driving of the heating elements corresponding to all the discharge ports is completed once.

However, in the case in which there are a large number of discharge ports, a magnitude of a current 15 pulse cannot be reduced simply by dividing the discharge ports into an appropriate number of blocks, and an amount of generation of inductive noises cannot be suppressed. It is also possible that the number of heating elements which are simultaneously 20 turned ON is reduced by increasing the number of blocks. However, in such a case, there is a fear in that a time allocated to one block is reduced and sufficient energy for ink discharge cannot be obtained.

25 Thus, USP 6,243,111 discloses a configuration for shifting a drive pulse, which is applied to heating elements belonging to an identical block,

little by little for each heating element. That is, in forming an ink jet head substrate, a hysteresis circuit is provided in an input section together with components for a logic discharge control circuit such 5 as heating elements, a driver, and a shift register and, at the same time, a CR (capacitor resistor) integrating circuit is formed in a signal path for a heat pulse (input pulse width signal), which regulates a pulse width and timing of a drive pulse, 10 such that the drive pulse is applied to different heating elements at staggered timing. Consequently, the heat pulse is delayed to drive the respective heating elements sequentially. In this way, timing of the heat pulse is staggered using the CR 15 integrating circuit, and a current flowing to the heating elements is controlled, whereby the number of heating elements which are turned ON at exactly the same timing is reduced, and a peak value of a current or a rising ratio of a current due to the drive pulse 20 is reduced to suppress generation of noises. Consequently, even if there is increase in the number of heating elements which are driven simultaneously due to increase in the number of discharge ports or high-density implementation of discharge ports 25 indispensable for high-speed printing, generation of inductive noises or the like can be suppressed.

However, in the case in which generation of

noises is suppressed by using the CR integrating circuit as disclosed in USP 6,243,111, if there are fluctuations in C (capacitance) and R (resistance), a product of the fluctuations results in a fluctuation 5 in a delay value of the heat pulse. Thus, a current flowing to the heating elements cannot be controlled with high accuracy and, as a result, generation of noises cannot be suppressed sufficiently. In addition, since the CR integrating circuit is 10 constituted by an input buffer, a capacitor, and a resistor, when a difference of a wiring pattern length to a logic circuit input of the next stage increases, the delay value fluctuates. In addition, in the head substrate which is typically manufactured 15 using a silicon semiconductor device manufacturing technique, a gate oxide film is often used for a capacitor and a diffused resistor is often used as a resistor. When it is intended to constitute a CR integrating circuit having a desired time constant, 20 the capacitor and the resistor occupy a large area on the head substrate, and the head substrate is enlarged.

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide an ink jet head substrate which 25 can sufficiently suppress generation of noises and can be constituted small in size, an ink jet head using such a substrate, and an ink jet print

apparatus.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, there is
5 provided an ink jet head substrate having a plurality
of heating elements and an input line for inputting a
pulse width regulating signal regulating a width of a
drive pulse to be applied to the heating elements on
a base substrate, characterized in that a logic
10 circuit for supplying the drive pulse to be applied
to the heating elements at staggered timing is
provided on a line for a pulse width regulating
signal.

In the present invention, as the above-
15 mentioned logic circuit, a delay circuit is
preferably used, in which CMOS inverter circuits of
even number stages are connected.

An ink jet head of the present invention is
characterized by including an ink jet head substrate
20 according to the present invention and a member which
is combined with the ink jet head substrate and forms
liquid paths relating to the heating elements and ink
discharge ports forming one end of the liquid paths.

An ink jet print apparatus of the present
25 invention is characterized by including an ink jet
head according to the present invention and means for
conveying a print medium relatively to the ink jet

head.

Other features advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate the same or similar parts throughout the figures thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

15 Fig. 1 is a circuit diagram of an ink jet head substrate of an embodiment of the present invention; Figs. 2A and 2B are circuit diagrams showing an example of a structure of an inverter delay circuit in the ink jet head substrate shown in Fig. 1;

20 Fig. 3 is a circuit diagram showing another example of a structure of the inverter delay circuit in the ink jet head substrate shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram of an ink jet head using the substrate shown in Fig. 1;

25 Fig. 5 is a perspective view showing an example of a structure of an ink jet print apparatus using the ink jet head shown in Fig. 4;

Figs. 6A and 6B are equivalent circuit diagrams of an electrostatic protective element shown in Fig. 1; and

Figs. 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D are film diagrams of 5 the electrostatic protective element shown in Figs. 6A and 6B.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Next, a preferred embodiment of the present 10 invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings. Fig. 1 is a diagram showing a circuit structure of an ink jet head substrate of an embodiment of the present invention.

The logic circuit means the circuit which 15 determines the output signal, according to an input signal. That which consists of the diode and the transistor is called DTL (Diode-Transistor Logic), and that which composed of the transistor instead of the diode is called TTL (Transistor-Transistor Logic).

20 In Fig. 1, a large number of heating elements 401 are provided on a substrate 400. One ends of the heating elements 401 are commonly connected to a heating element drive power supply and the other ends thereof are respectively grounded via a power 25 transistor 402 provided for each heating element 401. The power transistors 402 function as switches for the heating elements 401. A latch circuit 403 and a

shift register 404 are provided on the substrate 400. Moreover, for example, for the purpose of miniaturizing a printer main body power supply device by reducing the number of heating elements 401 to be 5 driven simultaneously to thereby reduce a current instantaneously flowing, a group of heating elements are divided into blocks each having a predetermined number of heating elements, and a time division drive block selecting logic 405 such as a decoder to be 10 provided in order to perform division driving in unit of blocks, a logic system buffer 101 having a hysteresis characteristic, and the like are formed on the substrate 400. In addition, as shown in the figure, electrostatic protective elements 406 may be 15 provided. Input signals include a clock for moving the shift register, an image data input for receiving image data serially, a latch clock for holding data in the latch circuit, a block enable signal for block selection, and a logic signal which is a heat pulse 20 for controlling an ON time of the power transistor, that is, a time during which the heating elements are driven, from the outside, as well as a logic circuit drive power supply (5V), a ground (GND) line, and a heating element drive power supply. These input 25 signals are inputted via pads 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, and 414 on the substrate, respectively. Moreover, there is provided an AND circuit for

calculating AND of a heat pulse, an output of the latch circuit 403, and an output from the decoder 405 for each power transistor 402, and controlling the power transistor 402 according to a result of the 5 calculation to allow a drive pulse to flow through the heating element 401.

Here, equivalent circuits of the electrostatic protective elements 406 are shown in Figs. 6A and 6B, and film structures thereof are shown in Figs. 7A to 10 7D. Although not shown in Fig. 1, the protective elements 406 are constituted by a circuit form of Fig. 6A provided with a pull-down resistor or a circuit form of Fig. 6B provided with a pull-up resistor. In Figs. 6A and 6B, reference numeral 600 (610) denotes 15 a pad equivalent to the pad on the substrate of Fig. 1; 606 (616), a buffer equivalent to logic system buffer 101 of Fig. 1; and 601 (611), a pull-down resistor (pull-up resistor) provided with a parasitic diode for electrostatic protection between ground 20 (GND) lines. Reference numerals 602 (612) and 604 (614) denote diodes for electrostatic protection connected to a logic circuit drive power supply (5V) line; 605 (615), a diode for electrostatic protection connected to the ground (GND) line; and 603 (613), a 25 polysilicon resistor. Dotted lines shown in Figs. 6A and 6B indicate paths through which a current in the case of being electrostatically discharged to the pad

600 (610) flows. As can be seen from this, between the pad 600 (610) and the polysilicon resistor 603 (613), a path defined by the parasitic diode 601 (611) connected to the ground (GND) line composed of 5 the pull-up resistor or the pull-down resistor and the diode 602 (612) connected to the logic circuit drive power supply (5V) is formed. In addition, between the polysilicon resistor 603 (613) and the buffer 606 (616), a path defined by the diode 605 10 (615) connected to the ground (GND) line and the diode 604 (614) connected to the logic circuit drive power supply (5V) is formed. Figs. 7A to 7D are diagrams showing film structures in which each component of Figs. 6A and 6B are shown. Fig. 7A 15 shows the pull-down resistor 601 with a parasitic diode, Fig. 7B shows the pull-up resistor 611 with a parasitic diode, Fig. 7C shows the diodes 602 (612) and 604 (614) connected to the logic circuit drive power supply (5V), and Fig. 7D shows the diode 605 20 (615) connected to the ground (GND) line. In Fig. 7A, reference numeral 701 denotes a P-type silicon substrate; 702, a P-type well area; 703, an N-type well area; 704, a field oxide film; and 705a, 705c, and 706c (705b and 706a shown in Figs. 7B and 7C), a 25 high concentration N-type area and a high concentration P-type area for taking ohmic contact with not-shown aluminum. Here, the N-type well area

703 used as a resistor becomes a terminal of a diode together with the high concentration P-type area 706c and is provided so as to connect the high concentration N-type area 705a directly connected to 5 the pad and the high concentration N-type area 705c provided apart from the high concentration N-type area 705a. The high concentration N-type area 705c is connected to the high concentration P-type area 706c provided in the P-type well area 702 via the 10 not-shown aluminum. Consequently, the N-type well area 703 constitutes the diode together with the P-type silicon substrate 701 and the P-type well area 702 and acts as a resistor between the high concentration N-type area 705a and the high 15 concentration N-type area 705c. Fig. 7B is the same as Fig. 7A except that the pull-down resistor is changed to the pull-up resistor because the high concentration N-type area 705c is replaced with the high concentration N-type area 705b. Thus, in Fig. 20 7B, the identical layers are denoted by the identical reference symbols, and repeated descriptions of the layers will be omitted. In Fig. 7C, the diode is constituted by the N-type well area 703, the high concentration P-type area 706a, and the high 25 concentration N-type area 705b. In Fig. 7D, the diode is constituted by the N-type well area 703, the P-type well area 702, the high concentration P-type

area 706c, and the high concentration N-type area 705a.

In a drive sequence of recording using this head substrate, first, image data is serially sent to 5 a substrate inside a head from a printer main body in synchronization with clock, and a shift register 404 in the substrate captures the image data. The captured data is temporarily stored in the latch circuit. Block selections are performed in a time 10 division manner until the next image data is held by the latch circuit 403. When a heat pulse is inputted from a heat pulse input pad 411 upon each of the block selections, one or more power transistors 402, for which block selection is performed and image data 15 is ON, are turned ON, and a current (drive pulse) flows to one or more heating elements 401, for which the block selection is performed and image data is ON, to drive the heating elements 401.

Moreover, in this embodiment, a delay circuit 20 group 102 is provided such that heating elements are driven at staggered timing even if the heating elements belong to an identical block, and heat pulses with different delay times are generated based upon a heat pulse inputted from the heat pulse input 25 pad 411 and supplied to the different heating elements 401 in the same block. That is, the delay circuit group 102 has several logic circuits 104 in

which inverter circuits are connected serially in an even number stages, and with respect to heating elements of the number found by deducting one from the number of heating elements included in the

5 identical block, outputs heat pulses corresponding to the respective heating elements onto respective heat pulse signal lines 103 corresponding to those heating elements. In the illustrated example, it is assumed that one block is constituted by four heating

10 elements 401, which are represented by A to D for the convenience's sake. The heat pulse inputted from the heat pulse input pad 411 is directly supplied to the heating element A. The heat pulse inputted from the heat pulse input pad 411 is supplied to the heating

15 element B via one logic circuit 104. A heat pulse, which is obtained by further delaying the heat pulse to be supplied to the heating element B with one logic circuit 104, is supplied to the heating element C. A heat pulse, which is obtained by further

20 delaying the heat pulse to be supplied to the heating element C with one logic circuit 104, is supplied to the heating element D. After all, heat pulses, which are obtained by delaying the heat pulse inputted in the heat pulse input pad 411 with the logic circuit

25 104 of one stage, two stages, and three stages, respectively, are supplied to the heating elements B, C, and D.

As such a logic circuit 104, an inverter delay circuit constituted by combining a plurality of inverter circuits, which are constituted by an identical film forming process of the logic system of 5 the drive control system including the shift register 404 and the latch circuit 403, can be used. Figs. 2A and 2B show an example of the logic circuit 104 provided as the delay circuit. Fig. 2A shows the logic circuit 104 at a block level, and Fig. 2B shows 10 the circuit in more detail at a gate level.

As shown in Fig. 2A, the logic circuit 104 is constituted by an input buffer 204, cascaded two-stage delays 205, and an output buffer 206. Here, all of the input buffer 204, the delays 205, and the 15 output buffer 206 are complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) inverter circuit. Since the delays 205 are provided in two stages, after all, this logic circuit 104 is a circuit constituted by cascading four-stage inverter circuits.

20 In this delay circuit, as shown in Fig. 2B, in the input buffer 204 and the output buffer 206, a gate length (channel length) L of each MOS transistor (p channel and n channel) constituting inverters thereof is set to $2 \mu\text{m}$ which is identical with that 25 of the logic system of the drive control system including the shift resistor 404 and the latch circuit 403. In addition, a gate length L in the

delays 205 is set to 10 μm , which is longer than 2 μm in the logic system, such that sufficient delay can be obtained. Note that a gate width (channel width) W in the delays 205 is set to the same value as that 5 in the input buffer 204 (e.g., 6 μm for n-MOS, 9 μm for p-MOS). A gate width W of the output buffer 206 is set to 12 μm for n-MOS and 18 μm for p-MOS.

In this embodiment, assuming that a block is formed by four heating elements 401, three delay 10 circuits 104 are provided for a signal line portion of the heat pulse from the heat pulse input pad 411 to constitute four types of heat pulse signal lines 103 which are wired such that a time required for a heat pulse to actually travel among the four heating 15 elements simultaneously selected by the block selection circuit 405 is staggered by 10 ns for each element. Here, operations of this embodiment will be described assuming that all the heating elements A to D in Fig. 1 are selected and driven, that is, 20 assuming that, in the case in which all signals applied to these heating elements from the latch 403 are active (enable) and a heat pulse is at a high level, the power transistor 402 is turned ON and a current flows to the heating element 401 as a drive 25 pulse.

The heating element A is driven by a heat pulse which is unchanged from that inputted in the heat

pulse input pad 411, and a waveform obtained by delaying the heat pulse to be applied to the heating element A becomes a heat pulse to be applied to the heating element B. In this case, a time when the

5 heat pulse actually exceeds a threshold value of the power transistor 402 to cause a current to start flowing to the heating element B (turn on the heating element B) is delayed to be later than a time when a current starts to flow to the heating element A.

10 Similarly, since a time when a current starts to flow to the heating element C and a time when a current starts to flow to the heating element D are sequentially delayed as well, a current pulse flowing to the heating element drive power supply line

15 changes to a step shape. That is, an amount of current change per unit time does not differ much from that in the case in which a single heating element is turned ON, and a noise level is significantly reduced.

20 Compared with the head substrate described in USP 6,243,111, in the head substrate of this embodiment, a heat pulse is delayed not by a CR integrating circuit but by a logic circuit such as a CMOS inverter. Thus, fluctuation of a delay amount

25 is reduced, and a current applied to a heating element can be controlled with high accuracy. Therefore, an amount of noises generated can be

further suppressed. Moreover, since the CMOS inverter circuit can be manufactured in a size smaller than the CR integrating circuit on a silicon semiconductor substrate, the head substrate of this 5 embodiment can be made smaller than the conventional one, which leads to reduction in cost and improvement in productivity.

Note that, in this embodiment, the case in which block selection is performed for four heating 10 elements simultaneously and a heat pulse transmission time is staggered for each heating element is illustrated. However, the number of heating elements constituting one block can be appropriately decided, and several heating elements may be combined within a 15 range in which a noise level does not become a problem to apply heat pulses to the heating elements at the same timing. It goes without saying that the present invention can be applied to a case in which any number of heating elements are simultaneously 20 turned ON by increasing or decreasing an amount of delay according to an inverter delay circuit and conducting wiring appropriately.

The above-mentioned inverter delay circuit 104 can be manufactured simultaneously with the head 25 substrate 400 without changing a process for manufacturing the head substrate 400 by forming the drive control logic system, the pulse width input

unit (pad 411), the block selection circuit 405, and the like, all of which include heating elements, a driver (power transistor), a shift resistor, and a latch circuit on a silicon semiconductor substrate, 5 with a film forming process. Therefore, since it is unnecessary to largely change the number of pads of the input unit of the substrate and other circuit components in the substrate, even if the delay circuit group 102 is provided as described above, 10 cost for the substrate itself is hardly increased. In addition, since it is possible to cope with noises in the head, it becomes unnecessary to attach a component such as a capacitor for countermeasure for noises to other parts. Therefore, reduction in cost 15 and miniaturization of the apparatus main body are realized.

In the present invention, the delay circuit 104 for delaying a heat pulse is not limited to those shown in Figs. 2A and 2B. Fig. 3 shows another 20 example of the delay circuit.

The delay circuit shown in Fig. 3 is provided with the input buffer 204, two-stage delays 209, and the output buffer 206 which is composed of a CMOS inverter circuit, respectively, as in the delay 25 circuit of Figs. 2A and 2B. However, the delays 209 are different from the delays shown in Figs. 2A and 2B. That is, in the delay circuit shown in Fig. 3,

the delays 209 serving as CMOS inverter circuits are circuits in which, in order to increase a delay amount, an N-channel MOS transistor in a usual CMOS inverter circuit (see Figs. 2A and 2B) is replaced

5 with two cascaded N-channel MOS transistors, and a P-channel MOS transistor is replaced with two cascaded P-channel MOS transistors. An output of the inverter at the pre-stage is commonly supplied to a gate of each MOS transistor.

10 With this structure, a sufficient delay time can be obtained without increasing a gate (channel) length L in each MOS transistor. In particular, since it is easy to make the gate length L in each MOS transistor constituting the delay circuit the 15 same as a gate length in the transistor of logic system of the drive control system including the shift register 404 and the latch circuit 403, there is an advantage that circuit design and layout design of the head substrate as a semiconductor device or an 20 integrated circuit become easy.

Next, a schematic structure of an ink jet head of the present invention using the above-mentioned head substrate will be described with reference to Fig. 4.

25 As described above, a plurality of heating elements (heaters) for receiving an electric signal to generate heat and discharge ink from discharge

ports 40 with bubbles generated by the heat are arranged in an array on the head substrate 400.

Flow paths 41 for supplying ink to the discharge ports 40 are provided in position opposed 5 to the heating elements and in association with the respective discharge ports. Walls constituting these discharge ports and flow paths are provided in grooved members 101, and these grooved members 101 are connected to the head substrate 400, whereby the 10 plurality of flow paths 41 and a common liquid chamber 21 for supplying ink to the flow paths 41 are provided.

Next, an ink jet print apparatus using such an ink jet head will be described.

15 Fig. 5 is a schematic view of an ink jet print apparatus IJRA to which the ink jet head of the present invention is applied. A carriage HC engaged with a spiral groove 5004 of a lead screw 5005, which rotates via driving force transmission gears 5011 and 20 5009 in association with forward and backward rotations of a drive motor 5013, is a carriage on which the ink jet head is detachably mounted, and has a pin (not shown), and is reciprocatingly moved in directions of an arrow a and an arrow b. Reference 25 numeral 5002 denotes a paper holding plate, which presses a print medium, typically paper, to a platen 5000 serving as print medium conveying means over a

carriage moving direction. Reference numerals 5007 and 5008 denote home position detection means which confirm the existence of a lever 5006 of the carriage in this area with a photo coupler to perform rotating 5 direction switching or the like of the motor 5013. Reference numeral 5016 denotes a member for supporting a cap member 5022 which caps the front surface of the ink jet head. Reference numeral 5015 denotes suction means which sucks the inside of this 10 cap and performs suction recovery of the ink jet head via an opening 5023 in the cap. Reference numeral 5017 denotes a cleaning blade and 5019 denotes a member for making this blade movable back and forth, both of which are supported by a main body support 15 plate 5018. It goes without saying that instead of the blade of this form, a well-known cleaning blade can be applied to this embodiment. In addition, reference numeral 5012 is a lever for starting suction of suction recovery, which moves in 20 accordance with the movement of a cam 5020 engaged with the carriage. A driving force from a drive motor is switched by publicly known transmission means such as clutch switching or the like to control the movement of the lever.

25 These capping, cleaning, and suction recovery are adapted such that, when the carriage comes to a home position side area, desired processing can be

performed in positions corresponding to the capping, the cleaning, and the suction recovery by the action of the lead screw 5005. Provided that a desired operation is performed at well-known timing, any of 5 them can be applied to this embodiment. Each structure in the above description is an excellent invention individually or in combination, and represents a preferable example of structure for the present invention.

10 Note that signal supply means, which supplies a drive signal for driving heating elements and other signals to the ink jet head (head substrate), is provided in this apparatus.